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Just in case you weren't paying attention to the election last November, the fiscally responsible political party won control of Congress. Well, not really, but that is what voters thought when they voted Republicans out of power.

Yes, I do admit our party deserved to lose credibility with voters on this issue. But thus far the new Democratic majority, which has already voted for the first tax increases in a decade and billions in new spending, has proven to be less responsible.

The road back to fiscal sanity in Washington is likely to be a long slog, unless Republicans are willing to boldly recommit ourselves to the principles that earned us the reputation as the party of lower taxes and less government. Today the Republican Study Committee, a caucus of approximately 100 fiscal and social conservatives in the House, will do just that when we unveil the American Taxpayer Bill of Rights. The plan, which I helped write as chair of the group's Budget and Spending Taskforce, is designed to change the way government works by giving Americans a transparent system that is based on honest budgeting and efficient government.

The reality is that our government has not operated responsibly for a long time. In 34 of the past 38 years the federal government has run a deficit, meaning it spent more money than it collected in taxes. This happened with every combination of Republicans and Democrats controlling the White House and Congress.

So how do we fix a system that is clearly broken? By being willing to make meaningful and substantive changes.

Today we will announce a four-item agenda that uses common-sense reforms to reduce wasteful spending, shield future generations from our fiscal irresponsibility and protect our

priorities. Our objectives will be as follows:

- Grow the federal budget at the same rate as the American family budget: Americans don't have the luxury of increasing their budgets whenever they feel like it, and our government shouldn't, either. We propose keeping the growth in government to a level that can be sustained and is equivalent to the growth American families experience.

- Protect the Social Security Trust Fund: Currently, there is nothing being done to ensure the money you pay into Social Security is spent only on Social Security. In fact, every year, hundreds of billions of Social Security dollars are spent on other things. As more baby boomers approach retirement, the best way to prepare for their retirement is to set the money aside specifically for them.

- Scrap the entire tax code: I think most, if not all, Americans will agree that our 7,000-page federal tax code is too complicated, too burdensome, and full of special-interest loopholes. We propose to eliminate the entire tax code by Jan. 1, 2011 and start fresh with a new system that will be easier to understand, more equitable, and less burdensome on our economy.

- A balanced-budget amendment that guards against tax increases: This takes the idea of a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget one step further by also constitutionally requiring a supermajority to increase taxes. The recent deficits have not been caused by a revenue problem. They have been caused by a spending problem, and we cannot let a Congress of either party pay for frivolous expansions of government by driving up taxes or leaving our kids with trillions of dollars in debt.

Now, I admit that it is unlikely to see these reforms go into effect with Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the other Democrats in control of Congress. But it does draw a line in the sand. If the Democrats are unwilling to accept these common-sense proposals – which is likely – it will expose their indifference to fiscal responsibility. And, if Republicans can stand firm in support of these ideas, we will have a taxpayer-friendly agenda to enact when we regain control.